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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 21st MEETING

Chairman: Mr. PETRESKI (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 96: ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (continued) (A/50/25, A/50/171, A/50/182-E/1995/66 and Corr.1, A/50/254-S/1995/501, A/50/366, A/50/371, A/50/400, A/50/407, A/50/425-S/1995/787, A/50/475, A/50/518; A/C.2/50/2)

(a) IMPLEMENTATION OF DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT (continued) (A/50/3, A/50/74 and Add.1, A/50/218, A/50/453, A/50/515)

(b) DESERTIFICATION AND DROUGHT (continued) (A/50/227-E/1995/99, A/50/347, A/50/516)

1. Mr. KJELLEN (Sweden), speaking as Chairman of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Counties Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, welcomed the convergence of views among delegations. The timetable for the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee's work should be adhered to since that would enable the Committee to prepare adequately for the first session of the Conference of the Parties which he hoped would take place in 1997. He was optimistic that the Convention would come into force in 1996.

2. Mr. TALBOT (Guyana), speaking on behalf of the 13 member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), expressed disappointment and concern at the slow progress being made to fulfil the commitments undertaken under the Rio Declaration and in the implementation of Agenda 21. Many countries of Africa, Latin America and the Pacific region were vulnerable to a variety of environmental hazards both natural and resulting from human activity. In that context, the CARICOM member States looked forward to the early entry into force of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. CARICOM also supported the convening of a special session of the General Assembly, no later than 1997, on the overall review and appraisal of Agenda 21. The Commission on Sustainable Development was ideally placed to prepare for that review.

3. Preparations for that meeting would have to incorporate not only the results of the conferences on various aspects of sustainable development but also take into account the proposed agenda for development. The international framework established to monitor and promote all programmes for sustainable development also needed to be evaluated.

4. Priority issues could include the particular problem of small island developing States, the identification of constraints in progress and the means by which such constraints could be overcome and the search for a harmonized approach to sustainable development should be considered. The aim of the session should be to secure a strong political commitment to prompt and full implementation of Agenda 21.

5. The single most important impediment to progress in the environmental field had been the failure to provide for the transfer of appropriate technology and

new and additional financial resources to developing countries. While the replenishment and restructuring of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) was most welcome, developed countries should honour the commitments they had made in Rio to increase their assistance flows to developing countries.

6. Concerning proposals for new and additional financing, the United Nations Development Programme had estimated that a 3 per cent reduction in military budgets during the current decade would provide roughly $1.5 trillion which could be used for sustainable development. Another proposal worthy of consideration was a tax on producers of pollution and speculative currency movements. Those measures, together with debt relief and equitable trading opportunities for developing countries could enable all States to fulfil the compact that Agenda 21 represented.

7. Mr. FOREMAN (Australia) said that the Commission on Sustainable Development should be endorsed as the appropriate forum to undertake preparatory work for the 1997 special session of the General Assembly. That preparatory work would enhance the Commission's political profile.

8. It was ironic that the Committee should be discussing environment and sustainable development at a time when some countries were giving little regard to the environmental impact of nuclear tests. Australia viewed the continuation of nuclear testing by China, and the resumption of nuclear testing by France as a backward step and as inconsistent with the provisions of Agenda 21. It deplored nuclear testing regardless of where it occurred.

9. As a biologically mega-diverse country, Australia had a strong interest in international activities concerning the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. The second meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity to be held in Jakarta, presented an opportunity to explore options for addressing those issues. That Conference should resolve outstanding procedural and administrative issues quickly so that it could effectively address its substantive work. The establishment of the Open-ended Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Panel on Forests was an important step in the development of consensus for action for the proper management, conservation and sustainable development of forests. In that connection, his country would host a conference on certification and labelling of forest products in May 1996.

10. He supported international action on the management of chemicals, including persistent organic pollutants that took account of regional variations in environmental conditions and requirements. The goal of sustainable development would best be met by an approach that considered the interests of all members of the international community.

11. His delegation supported the development of an international legally binding instrument for the application of the prior informed consent procedure for certain hazardous chemicals in international trade. The scope of such an instrument should not go beyond that of the current voluntary guidelines. Climate change was one of the most serious environmental problems facing the global community and his delegation was committed to working with other parties in seeking constructive and appropriate ways to strengthen the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

12. The successful implementation of Agenda 21 also required regional and national action. Australia had had its own national strategy for ecologically sustainable development since 1992 and was active in resource management issues at the regional level through the South Pacific Forum, the International Coral Reef Initiative and the implementation of the outcomes of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. Concerning the latter, the review of the Programme of Action by the Commission on Sustainable Development in 1996 and the General Assembly in 1997, would provide valuable indicators for the further activity necessary to assist small island States in their pursuit of sustainable development.

13. Australia was a founding member of the International Coral Reef Initiative whose aims included promoting education programmes, improved coastal management and coordinated research and monitoring at the global, regional and national levels to ensure that coral reef resources were managed in a sustainable fashion. The sustainable management of marine resources was particularly important for the Pacific region.

14. Mr. JABBARY (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the agreements reached at various international conferences on the environment had yet to be translated into action. Since emissions of pollutants into the environment, including toxic and hazardous wastes, originated primarily in the developed countries, and since the latter's unsustainable consumption and production patterns continued to be the major causes of the deterioration of the global environment, developed countries should take the main responsibility for protecting the environment.

15. They must, as a matter of urgency, start to implement the commitments that they had undertaken under Agenda 21, particularly by providing new and additional financial resources and transferring environmentally sound technologies on concessional and preferential terms to the developing countries.

16. The resources of the Global Environment Facility were far from adequate for the implementation of Agenda 21. His delegation endorsed the convening of a special session of the General Assembly in 1997 to review the implementation of Agenda 21. That session should focus on the removal of barriers to the expeditious and comprehensive implementation of the Agenda.

17. The provision of substantial financial resources and other forms of support for countries affected by the problems of desertification, particularly in Africa, was essential to the implementation by all parties of their obligations under the Convention to Combat Desertification. Measures should be taken to mobilize and transfer financial and technological resources.

18. Concerning efforts to combat desertification and the effects of drought in Iran, a programme office for the regional network of research and training on desertification control had been established in Tehran. At its most recent annual session, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific had supported the strengthening of that office and had requested the convening, in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme, of a high-level meeting of the regional network to develop further its role and mandate.

19. Mr. MAKUETJE (Lesotho), speaking on behalf of the member States of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), said that they attached great importance to the early entry into force of the Convention to Combat Desertification. Furthermore, they had long recognized the indispensable role of women in sound approaches to natural resource management, and welcomed the inclusion of the section on women and the environment in the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women.

20. The SADC countries had reviewed and improved their agricultural, land use management, energy and water resource management and population policies with the aim of creating an environment conducive to sustainable use of natural resources, thereby honouring their international obligations. A study on drought and desertification had provided important information for the elaboration of subregional action programmes. The SADC countries highly appreciated the cooperation and assistance they had received from the Interim Secretariat of the Convention to Combat Desertification.

21. It was estimated that over 6 million people in the southern Africa region would need emergency food assistance in 1995-1996 due to drought and the resulting land degradation. Despite government policy reform measures, lack of national capacity was causing implementation of those policies to proceed slowly. He urgently appealed to both bilateral and multilateral development partners to extend a helping hand in the form of financial and technological resources.

22. The States of southern Africa were encouraged to note that, since the expansion of its mandate to cover the entire African continent, the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO) had established a sub-office in Nairobi for eastern and southern African States. Its long experience in desertification and drought would be very useful to those countries' efforts to deal with the consequences of drought on the lives of the desert populations in the Kalahari and Namib deserts. A number of institutions in the region had been identified for strengthening and capacity-building.

23. The observance of World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought provided a clear testimony to the effectiveness of national sensitization and awareness campaigns; those campaigns must be expanded.

24. Mr. BASMAJIEV (Bulgaria) said that while the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development had represented a milestone in promoting international cooperation on sustainable development, much remained to be done. Bulgaria recognized that, together with efforts at the international level, the success of the process begun at Rio would depend largely on the practical implementation, at the national level, of the goals and commitments agreed upon. Bulgaria's efforts to create an overall strategy for sustainable development were aimed mainly at institutional strengthening and capacity-building. Insufficient financial resources and a number of external factors were limiting its economic and social development, however. Increased coordination at the regional level was also of crucial importance for achieving the goals of Agenda 21.

25. Bulgaria considered the Commission on Sustainable Development the most important instrument in the follow-up process of the Rio Conference and believed that it should continue to maintain a high political profile. Bulgaria also supported the reaffirmation in General Assembly resolution 48/174 of the central role of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) as the principal body to coordinate and stimulate action in the field of the environment within the United Nations system. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) should also continue to play an important role. Efforts to implement the commitments of the multilateral environmental agreements should include the stimulation of international trade as an important factor for sustainable development.

26. With regard to the special session of the General Assembly scheduled for 1997, the identification of critical areas of sustainability must be based on a comprehensive review of the progress achieved in the implementation of the Rio commitments. The special session would help to maintain political momentum and give a clear sense of direction. The special session should result in a declaration which would set out future actions and priorities to promote sustainable development.

27. Mr. HONG Je Ryong (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that while much had been achieved in the field of environment and development since the adoption of Agenda 21, many of the commitments undertaken remained unfulfilled; States must now display the requisite political will to achieve environmentally sound and sustainable development in a genuine global partnership. To that end, the developed countries should increase their official development assistance, provide new and additional financial resources and transfer environmentally sound technologies on concessional and preferential terms. They also should refrain from creating obstacles to the mobilization of financing for the benefit of the developing countries.

28. His delegation was satisfied with the enhanced role of UNEP in environmental matters within the United Nations system and looked forward to increasingly closer coordination between UNEP and the Commission on Sustainable Development. It attached considerable importance to the 1997 special session of the General Assembly on the overall review and appraisal of Agenda 21 and hoped that the valuable proposals contained in document A/50/453 with regard to the special session would be supplemented by proposals to be made at the current session and in the preparatory process for the special session. His Government, in keeping with its national strategy for the implementation of Agenda 21, pledged its close cooperation to that end.

29. Mr. ONGERI (Kenya) said that his country reaffirmed its support to the United Nations development agenda, which was geared towards alleviation of poverty and suffering in developing countries in a spirit of partnership. Appropriate resources and technology transfer were a prerequisite to the sound and equitable sharing of burdens in the development endeavour. Agenda 21 should be viewed as an international commitment to promote sustainable development. While the international community had stressed the interdependence and complementarity of environment and development, unless sufficient resources were mobilized to implement Agenda 21, sustainable development would be very difficult to achieve.

30. Kenya had ratified the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity; the Convention to Combat Desertification was in the ratification process. A bill containing umbrella legislation in the field of the environment was ready to be submitted to its National Assembly.

31. UNEP was at the centre of the implementation of Agenda 21. The strengthening of its regional offices, however, should not result in the weakening of its headquarters at Nairobi. His delegation was concerned at the growing number of environmental meetings being held outside UNEP headquarters. The Government of Kenya had also expressed strong interest in hosting the permanent secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity at Nairobi.

32. Mr. AZAIEZ (Tunisia) said that, given the complexity of the commitments set out in Agenda 21, it was not surprising that it was taking a long time to achieve its goals. It was now necessary to build on the momentum of Rio, and all countries, in particular wealthy nations, should strive to ensure the full implementation of Agenda 21.

33. His own country's activities to achieve sustainable development were focused on combating desertification, protecting water resources and achieving a balance between energy consumption and environmental protection. His country accorded due attention to the socio-economic aspects of the problem of desertification and sought a better understanding of the mechanisms of erosion and desertification and of socially acceptable and economically viable techniques to combat them. Some progress had been made, but much remained to be done. The cooperation of the international community was crucial, and he urged a greater commitment to the Convention to Combat Desertification, as well as to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity. He also urged countries to increase their contributions to the Trust Fund and the Special Voluntary Fund relating to desertification.

34. His country's efforts to ensure an adequate supply of safe water were part of a long-term strategy to restore, safeguard, manage and develop natural resources in keeping with the ecological characteristics of each region. With a view to the rational use of energy resources and in the interests of seeking new and renewable sources of energy, his country was pursuing a policy designed to achieve substantial energy savings in the future and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It had established an environment and development observatory to secure detailed data on the various components of the environment.

35. The achievement of the goals established in Agenda 21 required the concerted efforts of all members of the international community, and he underscored the importance to the developing countries of adequate financing and the transfer of appropriate technology. The special session of the General Assembly to be convened in 1997 should, inter alia, seek improved ways to ensure such transfers. It should provide an opportunity for Governments to evaluate progress made and objectively analyse shortcomings.

36. Mr. SAMANA (Papua New Guinea), speaking in his capacity as Chairman of the South Pacific Forum on behalf of the delegations of Australia, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, the Marshall Islands, New Zealand, Palau, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and his own country, said that Agenda 21 provided a

solid framework for establishing a balance between consumption, production and sustainable economic and social development. The United Nations should take pride in having facilitated the establishment of legal regimes, commitments, guidelines and action plans to protect global resources and combat environmental problems. Most of the countries on whose behalf he was speaking had taken steps to become parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

37. Forum countries had increased their active participation in recent international and regional forums, in which they had emphasized the importance of maintaining sound environmental management practices and sustainable development. The South Pacific Forum was a vital component of the international network following up the decisions reached at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and at follow-up forums, in particular in the Commission on Sustainable Development. The South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) provided a forum for regional cooperation on transboundary environment issues.

38. Although the delegations on whose behalf he was speaking welcomed the Secretary-General's recommendation to strengthen and expand cooperation between UNEP and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), such institutionalization would be successful only if appropriate funding was provided in a timely manner. Regional efforts were under way to enable member countries to fulfil their national commitments under the Convention on Climate Change.

39. Member countries of the Forum had reaffirmed the need for a code of conduct on logging as a main feature of a comprehensive approach to sustainable forest conservation and management. They looked forward to contributing their experience to the Open-ended Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Panel on Forests. It was unfortunate that at the Panel's recent meeting valuable energy had been wasted revisiting its agreed mandate and terms of reference. Its goal should be to devise constructive activities sensitive to national priorities and strategies, particularly those of the developing countries.

40. With regard to fisheries and marine resources, Forum countries had played an active role in, and had already embarked on follow-up work to, the United Nations Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks.

41. As to linkages within the United Nations, he welcomed the ongoing progress in the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action and believed that the Small Island Developing States Unit of the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development should be strengthened. The protection of the world's oceans was a major concern for the survival of such States, and he welcomed the European Union's support of the global programme of action for the protection of the marine environment from land-based activities that was to be adopted shortly. Forum members had recently endorsed the Convention to Ban the Importation into Forum Island Countries of Hazardous and Radioactive Wastes and to Control the Transboundary Movement and Management of Hazardous Wastes within the South Pacific Region (Waigani Convention).

42. The delegations on whose behalf he was speaking had reacted with extreme outrage to the resumption of nuclear testing by France in the region. Their call for an immediate halt to the testing, had been echoed around the world, and was reflected in a resolution currently before the First Committee of the General Assembly. By resuming nuclear tests France was ignoring its obligations with respect to the precautionary approach explicit in Agenda 21 and threatening the social and economic survival of the countries of the region. A proper scientific investigation must be undertaken to evaluate the environmental impact of French nuclear tests; the results of the study should be published free from political censorship.

43. The goodwill generated by the decision by France, the United States and the United Kingdom to sign the Protocols of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty (Treaty of Rarotonga) would be greatly enhanced by a complementary decision to proceed to an immediate and indefinite halt to nuclear testing.

44. Mr. ELTINAY (Sudan) said that his delegation attached particular importance to the work of UNEP and had participated actively in the elaboration of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. The Sudan believed there was an intimate link between the eradication of poverty, the protection of the environment and the realization of sustainable development. The total amount of agricultural land in the Sudan shrank a little more each year, due to the results of desertification and drought. Since it had no alternative energy sources the Sudan had lost 10 per cent of its forests since it gained independence. Moreover, the influx of large numbers of refugees from conflict-torn or drought-afflicted neighbouring States had adversely affected the environment and depleted agricultural resources.

45. In response, the Sudanese Government had devised a comprehensive national strategy dealing with interrelated economic, social and environmental policies. A Ministry for the Environment had been created, along with a Higher Council for the Environment and Natural Resources, each charged with planning, policy elaboration, coordination and monitoring of environmental affairs. The Sudan was working to bring its national legislation into line with the commitments it had undertaken at the international level. Laws had been passed to protect Sudan's forests and a programme was being devised to involve all sectors of society in a reafforestation programme. Working with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the Sudan had implemented a programme to combat plant epidemics and had continued cooperation with research organizations to develop alternative sources of energy. A project to protect wildlife reserves had been devised but was awaiting funding from the Global Environmental Facility. Other work included the setting up of an early warning system for cases of drought and natural disasters, and ongoing cooperation with regional partners. Funding was still required for a public awareness programme on environmental issues.

46. While the Sudan had demonstrated its commitment to action, it had received little support from donor States for the implementation of its environmental programmes. It was hard to see how the environment could be protected when financing for such projects was refused. While the Sudan remained committed to the implementation of the Rio commitments, he stressed that more financing was needed if environmental and development goals were to be achieved.

47. Mr. MAINALI (Nepal) said that unless poverty was eradicated from the world, it would not be possible to achieve sustainable development. Investment in people and investment in environmental protection were equally important. Recognizing the vital importance of environmental protection, Nepal had established a high-level environmental protection council, which was responsible for coordinating cross-sectoral activities relating to the environment.

48. The forthcoming special session of the General Assembly on the review and appraisal of Agenda 21 should provide an opportunity for promoting an integrated approach to environmental and developmental issues and further strengthen the consensus reached at the Rio Conference. An increase in official development assistance, improved market access for export products, more equitable terms of trade, encouragement of foreign investments and the transfer of environmentally sound technologies on a concessional and preferential basis would greatly facilitate the efforts of the developing countries, in particular the least developed among them, to implement Agenda 21. He underscored the urgent need for improved coordination between the United Nations and its development agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions. Lastly, the agenda for development should establish a clear linkage between social, economic and political issues in matters pertaining to environmental protection and sustainable development.

49. Mr. KEBEDE (Ethiopia) said that his country was affected by recurrent drought and desert encroachment and therefore attached paramount importance to the implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification. It was disquieting to note that, despite the appeal contained in General Assembly resolution 48/175 for contributions to the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office, contributions had, in fact, decreased. His delegation therefore appealed to its development partners to demonstrate their commitment by mobilizing additional resources for the multilateral funding of the efforts of developing countries to combat desertification and drought.

50. Given the important issues pending before the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, his delegation agreed that all Governments and concerned international organizations should make substantial contributions to the Special Voluntary Fund in order to ensure the full and effective participation of experts from developing countries. The replenishment of the Trust Fund was of critical importance to the success of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee's future work and to the implementation of the Convention.

51. His country had developed a national disaster prevention and management policy and guidelines to mitigate the effects of drought. A national conservation strategy sought to harmonize development and environment programmes by focusing on such issues as soil degradation, deforestation, range land management, access to national resources, community participation and population and demographic issues, which had a direct bearing on efforts to combat desertification. The decentralization and democratization process in his country had created a favourable environment for popular participation in the preparation and implementation of such strategies. In conclusion, he

underscored the importance of international support for national and regional efforts to protect the environment.

52. Mr. RESHETNYAK (Ukraine) said that while some progress had been achieved since the Rio Conference in the implementation of Agenda 21, as evidenced by the elaboration and entry into force of a number of environmental conventions, destruction of the environment was occurring at a faster pace than human actions to combat it.

53. For developing countries and those with transition economies, implementing the concept of sustainable development required mobilization of additional resources which were often non-existent. Capital flows from developed countries and rational use of domestic resources were key, as was income from foreign economic activity, which could increase substantially with the lowering of protectionist barriers and trade liberalization. At the same time, however, each member of the international community bore the main responsibility for its own social and economic development, including its environmental aspects.

54. Ukraine had drawn up a draft State programme for the protection of the environment and the rational use of natural resources, which was awaiting approved by Parliament. It was also forming a national committee for sustainable development, which would deal with the aftermath of Chernobyl, among other tasks.

55. His delegation welcomed the results of the third session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, in particular the establishment of an Open-ended Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Panel on Forests. That Commission was becoming a unique forum for discussion of environmental cooperation and a basic coordination mechanism for all United Nations bodies in implementing the concept of sustainable development. Its full potential could be reached if effective ways and means were found for increased interaction between the Commission, UNEP and other intergovernmental bodies.

56. Ukraine supported proposals for a 1997 special session of the General Assembly devoted to the implementation of Agenda 21. The preparatory process must involve non-governmental, scientific, business and political organizations. The mass media must also play a role in creating among the general public a sense of moral responsibility for finding solutions to global environmental problems.

57. Mr. SHIBATA (Japan) noted that much had been done to implement the contents of Agenda 21; agreements had been reached on climate change, fish stocks, forests and desertification and drought. However, more work still remained to be done to promote cooperation on sustainable development.

58. The special session of the General Assembly should lead to the renewal of the Rio commitments and give fresh political impetus to the sustainable development process. It would provide an opportunity to forge a global consensus on the need for a long-term strategy, and strengthen the Commission on Sustainable Development. It should produce a political declaration outlining guidelines for action and priorities to be undertaken by national and international bodies. The preparatory work should commence at the 1996 session

of the Commission on Sustainable Development. The special session, which should have the active participation of other major groups, should be scheduled for the end of the year so as to maximize its political impact.

59. UNEP should be strengthened and made both more efficient and effective. Japan welcomed the UNEP Governing Council's recent decision to review the Programme's governing structure and its ongoing support for the Commission on Sustainable Development.

60. Over 100 countries thus far had signed the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification; action was now needed to implement its goals. To that end, Japan would continue to support the negotiation process.

61. Mr. TIENDREBEOGO (Burkina Faso) said that his country welcomed efforts to enhance international and regional cooperation on environmental issues including the establishment of a United Nations office in Nairobi. Given the contents of Agenda 21 and the increasing complexity of environmental problems, it was disturbing to see that UNEP was having to prove itself more effective and efficient while receiving decreasing financial resources. If the current trend continued, its work was likely to suffer and its goals would probably not be achieved.

62. While numerous commitments had been undertaken at the Rio Conference, they had not all been translated into action, due to a general failure to demonstrate true partnership; that could only be remedied through the exercise of political will. Burkina Faso hoped that the planned special session of the General Assembly on Agenda 21 would prove to be a turning-point in the implementation of the Rio commitments.

63. Burkina Faso welcomed the support of international agencies and organizations in the fight against desertification and believed that training and public awareness were among the best means of combating the phenomenon. In addition to a public awareness campaign, projects had been devised to promote the greening of the entire national territory, involving plant production, the planting of trees and protection of existing natural vegetation. Reafforestation and forest protection programmes were being implemented and use of gas as the primary source of energy had been set as a national priority.

64. Those were but a few examples of actions taken at the national level to protect the environment and combat desertification and drought, but international support was still needed. The international community should increase its contributions to the budget of the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office and offer effective support to the fight against desertification and drought.

65. Mr. AGONA (Uganda) said that the Rio Conference had been a landmark in international cooperation for development, recognizing the link between poverty eradication, production and consumption patterns, and the sustainable use of resources. Thus far the financial resources provided for the implementation of Agenda 21 had proved totally inadequate. Certain parties seemed to have adopted a selective approach to the Rio commitments, either because the threats posed to the global environment had been exaggerated or because a decision had been taken

to ignore the dangers, leaving them for future generations. Perhaps some considered that the problems were specific only to the third world, but that view was shortsighted. The positive attitude expressed by Japan was a welcome exception to the general trend.

66. The developing countries continued to call for concrete action to support their efforts in the areas of resource flows, trade, debt servicing and technology. In that regard, the special session of the General Assembly should be used as an opportunity to renew commitment to a global effort to protect the environment.

67. Drought and desertification were tremendous problems that threatened the survival of entire communities; they must be dealt with in an integrated manner. Although the United Nations organizations concerned had done much, international response to efforts to combat desertification and drought had thus far been lukewarm. The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee should complete its work in as timely a manner as possible, and adopt a clear funding strategy; the interim secretariat should be fully supported and urgent action should be undertaken to assist the most affected areas in Africa.

68. Mr. RYSTO (France), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the allegations of two delegations that the nuclear testing, currently being conducted by France, would adversely affect human and environmental health, were not supported by the findings of the research undertaken by high-level scientific groups at Mururoa Atoll, including a report presented to the Brisbane forum in Australia. A report by the European Commission had concluded that there was no danger of exposure to radiation as a result of the tests and stated that the level of radiation was set at 0.002 of the required level for safety.

69. Mr. FOREMAN (Australia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that his delegation totally disagreed with the points made by France and supported the statements made by the delegation of Papua New Guinea on behalf of the South Pacific Forum. Nuclear testing did, indeed, pose a serious threat to human health and the environment; if that were not the case why had France decided to undertake nuclear testing tens of thousands of kilometres away from metropolitan France? The French statements were, at best, an expression of hope; at worst, they ignored the risk of a serious accident in the South Pacific. France should acknowledge the call by countries in the South Pacific and elsewhere to put an end to nuclear testing.

70. Mr. SAMANA (Papua New Guinea), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that if nuclear testing was safe, France would surely have conducted the tests either in the Bay of Biscay or Paris. France had failed to address the question of who would be directly affected if there were a nuclear accident, and who would have to clear up afterwards. No answers had been provided as to why the second nuclear test had been moved from Mururoa Atoll, nor was it clear which enemy France had in mind when developing nuclear weapons in a post-cold-war world. France had been suspended as a dialogue partner with the South Pacific Forum until it put a stop to nuclear tests in the region. France must comply with international law and could not run away from long-term environmental problems.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.